



**NOAA, NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE, WEATHER FORECAST OFFICE**

**Miami, Florida 33165**

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*Photo Credit: Dan Gregoria*

## **2013 Severe Weather Awareness Week**

### **Monday February 11th: Lightning Awareness Day**

Lightning is one of nature's deadliest and most unpredictable phenomena, but also one that is virtually a daily occurrence in South Florida during the rainy season. Although meteorologists can detect the location of thunderstorms and forecast their general

movement, it is virtually impossible to predict exactly where the next lightning bolt may strike. This fact makes lightning one of nature's biggest killers.

One lightning death was reported in south Florida in 2012. A fisherman was struck and killed during a fishing tournament on Lake Okeechobee in June. An additional four people were injured as a result of lightning strikes. These numbers are lower than the long-term south Florida averages of 2 deaths and 9 injuries per year. Nationwide, 28 people were killed by lightning in 2012 which is lower than the 30-year average of 54 per year.

This downward trend in lightning casualties is certainly good news and largely a result of increased community educational and awareness efforts. Thunderstorms and potentially-deadly lightning are a normal part of South Florida's weather; therefore the successful preventive measures need to continue in order to prevent future incidents.

### **DON'T JUST LOOK STRAIGHT UP**

A dangerous misperception about lightning is that it only strikes when dark clouds are directly overhead. Several cases in the past few years have proven this to be false. Lightning commonly strikes several miles away from the heavy rain area of the thunderstorm, and in some cases can strike up to 10 miles away or more! This type of lightning is misleadingly referred to as "dry lightning" or "bolts from the blue", but they actually originate from the side of a thunderstorm cloud and are just as deadly as those that occur in the middle of a heavy downpour. Therefore, the greatest danger often comes with the first or last flash because that's when people least expect lightning to strike.

**Here's a simple lightning safety tip that can save your life:** When you see lightning or hear thunder, head to the nearest safe building. The inside of a vehicle can also be used as a place of shelter only if there are no buildings nearby. Darkening clouds are usually the first sign that lightning may strike nearby.

Recent studies have shown that teenage boys are the most likely group to be killed by lightning in Florida. The age group from 10 to 19 years of age has the greatest number of deaths, followed by those in their 30s and 20s. The number of 10 to 19 year old lightning deaths is greater than the number of lightning deaths of those 40 and older.

Although the National Weather Service does not issue specific lightning warnings, products such as the Hazardous Weather Outlook and the Surf Forecast describe the daily lightning danger in South Florida on a scale ranging from none, to slight, to moderate to high. When a storm producing excessive lightning is observed or is imminent, a Special Weather Statement/Significant Weather Advisory is issued to alert

of its location. Checking these products before venturing outside can make the difference between life and death.

Remember, any thunderstorm can produce a lightning flash which can kill you and those nearby.

Some locations are more dangerous than others. The greatest numbers of people in Florida are struck while near or on a body of water. Many others are struck while standing under trees. Another vulnerable location is an open area with few trees such as a construction site, ball fields, playgrounds or golf courses. School related activities also rate high in lightning vulnerability. These include walking to and from school and after school events.

The large number of high rise buildings in South Florida also puts construction workers and even residents in upper floors at a greater risk since tall objects are struck by lightning much more frequently than objects close to the ground.

No place outdoors is safe from lightning. Even the inside of an automobile, while safer than being outside, is not as safe as being inside an enclosed building. If planning to be outdoors, stay informed of the latest weather conditions by listening to NOAA Weather Radio or by monitoring the latest forecasts via TV, radio, cell phone or the internet. Be prepared to take shelter inside an enclosed building if a thunderstorm approaches or forms nearby.

For further lightning information, as well as daily hazardous weather outlooks which indicate the threat of lightning over South Florida, as well as special weather statements, please visit the National Weather Service in Miami website at [www.weather.gov/southflorida](http://www.weather.gov/southflorida).

For general lightning safety tips as well as educational material, please visit the National Weather Service lightning safety page at [www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov](http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov).